

Blog Export: Beaneball, <http://beaneball.org/>

Thursday, March 13, 2008

More from Congress

Russ Feingold called recently captured arms dealer Viktor Bout "diabolical" and denounced the "unrestrained capitalism" in post-USSR Russia that allowed Bout to build his empire. Diabolical! He's not Dr. Evil, Russ! (Although I will say he probably is evil, with a lower-case "e"; Feingold mentions that he's been known to sell arms to both sides of conflicts -- I think if I were an arms dealer, I'd be more ideologically based, and just pick a side.) Most interestingly, Bout, according to Feingold, has been linked to Russian intelligence and American government contractors. That's kind of problematic.

(We interrupt this Congressional commentary to bring you this: I just received a call from "Angela at New York Sports Club". She asked me if I was enjoying my time at NYSC. I said yes. She said, "Great, thanks." That was the end of the call. Literally like 10 seconds. That's the weirdest phone survey I've ever been part of.)

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Politics at 16:41

Blog Export: Beaneball, <http://beaneball.org/>

Wednesday, March 12, 2008

Recent Congressional action, with obnoxious commentary

So GovTrack.us is an amazing site -- you can set up "alerts" for various things happening in Congress: particular congresspeople speaking or voting or introducing bills; action on particular types of bills; committee actions; and so forth. You can use their website to track these alerts, or you can set up RSS feeds. Also, they use OpenID. Anyway, I now Track our Gov. Here's some interesting stuff from the last two days, which will go partly to show just how much random, time-wasting stuff our legislature gets up to.

John Shadegg, R-AZ, introduced "Jenny's Law", which would disallow "Tier III sex offenders" from being buried in the National Cemetery or getting burial honors and whatnot. "Tier III sex offender" comes from the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act, at P.L. 109-248. III is the highest tier, and refers to sex offenders who commit offenses punishable by more than a year in prison and is "comparable to" aggravated sexual abuse or abusive sexual contact (both of which are defined federal crimes). I don't see any conceivable purpose for this bill. Then again, I'm not a believer in retributivism in criminal punishment, so I guess your view of the propriety of this kind of law depends on how you feel about the purpose of punishment.

John Salazar, D-CO, introduced this: "The Secretary of Defense may not transport hydrolysate from the Pueblo Chemical Depot, Colorado, or the Blue Grass Army Depot, Kentucky, to an off-site location for treatment, storage, or disposal." The bill is cosponsored by a Kentuckian and a fellow Coloradan. Wikipedia tells me this about hydrolysate: "Hydrolyzed collagen, HCP, also known as purified gelatin and collagen hydrolysate, is collagen that has been enzymatically or chemically processed to make it more digestible and more easily absorbed by the body. HCP is often used by body builders because it is a relatively inexpensive protein source. It is also used to treat skin disorders, treat or prevent malnutrition and for those who cannot tolerate large amounts of bulk food, such as patients of weight loss surgery." It seems that the bill may refer to VX hydrolysate, which is a neutralized form of a chemical weapon. Apparently shipping this stuff can, if it's not properly neutralized, cause a health hazard. Thus perhaps it's sensible for the Coloradans and Kentuckians to be a little worried about truckloads of VX hydrolysate making its way down their highways to be incinerated.

Tim Murphy, R-PA, wants a Resolution honoring the recently deceased Steelers announcer Myron Cope. I'm sure Myron would have appreciated that while he was alive, Mr. Murphy. (That said, maybe Congressional recognition that Myron Cope invented the Terrible Towel is entirely appropriate.)

Steve Kagan, D-WI, offers a Resolution honoring Brett Favre. Don't do it! He'll cry! And then right-wing radio hosts will make vicious jokes! But, you know, of course, the House has to "understand[]" that retirement means reoccupation, knowing that Brett Favre will now be busier than ever before as he helps to build a better future for all of us." If not for Brett Favre, who'll do it? (Oh, wait, you mean that's supposed to be Congress's job?)

The late E. Arthur Gray, former mayor Port Jervis, New York (no, it's not a port; yes, it is basically in Pennsylvania), may get a Post Office in his town named for him. The bill has passed the House.

Not to be outdone, Steve W. Allee is getting a Carrier Annex in Lebanon, Missouri named for him. If you just do a quick Google, Allee just looks like a guy who died in a car accident when he tried to drive across a flooded roadway. Turns out, though, that it was a flash flood and he was on duty at the time, delivering the mail. (Google does add something that Congress didn't, though: Allee wasn't wearing his seat belt.)

The House has passed a Resolution adopting an Office of Congressional Ethics. This passed essentially on party lines, 195 Dems and 33 Reps for, 23 and 159 against. Crossover Democrats include John Murtha, Heath Shuler, and Maxine Waters. Crossover Republicans include the aforementioned Tim Murphy and Chris Shays.

A unanimous resolution in the House congratulated Kansas for winning the Orange Bowl. Dude, you're like two months late, Congress.

This one's a little better. UCLA won the championship in women's water polo, which obviously deserves a House Resolution. (More importantly, the Resolution notes that this is UCLA's 100th NCAA championship, the most ever. Awesome. Go Bruins.)

Blog Export: Beaneball, <http://beaneball.org/>

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Politics at 22:06

Thursday, February 7, 2008

Romney goes down swinging ... at Obama and Clinton

Mitt Romney, on dropping out of the Republican race: "In this time of war, I simply cannot let my campaign be a part of aiding a surrender to terror. This is not an easy decision. I hate to lose." And: "If this were only about me, I'd go on. But it's never been only about me. I entered this race because I love America, and because I love America, in this time of war I feel I have to now stand aside for our party and for our country." Really, Mitt Romney? "Aiding a surrender to terror"? That's completely cheap, utterly indefensible, and will, sadly, only endear him to a certain (significant) element of the Republican party.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Politics at 15:10

Blog Export: Beaneball, <http://beaneball.org/>

Sunday, September 23, 2007

Wedding announcements

The Chronicle of Higher Ed isn't really known for wedding announcements, but when Hampshire's president gets married, I guess it's a special occasion.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in News at 17:25

Blog Export: Beaneball, <http://beaneball.org/>

Monday, April 23, 2007

French presidential election = ok

At least things are going right somewhere in the world: Jean-Marie Le Pen received only about 10% of the vote in the first round of the French presidential election, placing a distant fourth and leaving him on the outside of the runoff to take place in about two weeks.

The turnout rate for the election, by the way, was near 85%. Democracy can involve participation.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Politics at 06:37

Sunday, March 4, 2007

Ann Coulter = Scum

As to Ann Coulter, I'm not sure whether her use of the word "faggot" in reference to John Edwards was even the most offensive thing she said. CNN's story mentions that she also said the following: I don't know why all gays aren't Republican. I think we have the pro-gay positions, which is anti-crime and for tax cuts. Gays make a lot of money and they're victims of crime. No, they are! They should be with us. Slurs vs. stereotypes. I honestly don't know which is worse.

Of course, either way, she's a horrible human being and is some of the best evidence we have for a more European approach to speech (see France and Germany re: Nazism and anti-Semitism, for instance). Coulter's right that gay people are victims of crime. The question is how many more hate crimes we need to see before people like Coulter start being put in their place. She's not only unfunny and offensive, I'd go so far as to say that she's dangerous. As long as someone like her (apparently a smart person - cum laude graduate of Cornell, Order of the Coif at Michigan Law) keeps thinking it's ok to use this kind of language and to make these kinds of generalizations, others will think it's ok to beat people to death and leave them tied to fenceposts in the middle of nowhere.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in News at 16:18

Sunday, February 4, 2007

John McCain != flip-flop'r

The rabid wolves over at DailyKos are all over John McCain for an alleged "flip flop" (please, please, please, enough with that already, yes?) on George Stephanopoulos's program today.

As some of the commenters there have noted, I just don't buy that as a "flip flop" at all. First response says, "No, thinks aren't going to be hunky dory by April. It'd be crazy to think that." Second response says, "I think in a couple of months, we'll be able to see how things are going and how they're going to continue to go in the future and be able to make some predictions." But I'm not sure how the second can be justifiably said to "flip flop" from the first, because it's entirely consistent to say that both things are true.

Look, I'm just as much anti-McCain as the next Good Liberal. He's turned out to be completely disingenuous (which is really something, to be noticeably more disingenuous than other politicians) in stating his positions, but is it really necessary to pounce all over the guy at the slightest hint that he's saying anything silly? Particularly when he's not saying anything silly at all!

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in News at 15:16

Blog Export: Beaneball, <http://beaneball.org/>

Tuesday, November 28, 2006

Bush only has two kids?

The headline on this article says: " Bush: No pullout from Iraq until 'mission is complete'". Clearly, Mr. Bush misunderstands the nature of the pullout method.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in News at 12:20

Blog Export: Beaneball, <http://beaneball.org/>

Tuesday, February 7, 2006

Quote of the day

I saw this quote today in a CNN story: "It was 'Lord of the Flies' with adult supervision," said William Smith, spokesman for Staten Island District Attorney Daniel Donovan[.] Excuse me? Isn't this one of those "Hamlet, but without the Prince of Denmark" situations? You can't do that!

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in News at 15:27

Saturday, February 4, 2006

Burning embassies in Syria

Here's CNN's story about Norwegian and Danish embassies being burned in Syria in the ever-increasing furor over depictions of Mohammed.

I don't know if I can capture the indignance in text, but here was Austen's reaction: "You can't just burn embassies because you don't like cartoons!"

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in News at 21:21

Blog Export: Beaneball, <http://beaneball.org/>

Thursday, January 19, 2006

What's in the news

Here're the articles I read today.

At CleveScene.com a story about an Ohio Supreme Court decision that allows insurance companies to get their money back if they pay out to cover injuries that, it turns out, are covered by some other insurance. In the case at hand, a girl was hurt in a car accident and the other driver's insurance company paid up. The family's insurance paid something as well, but when the total bills turned out to be covered by the other driver's insurance, the family's insurance company demanded its money back.

The paper, of course, blasts this as being unfair "to the little guy." I'm not sure. Clearly, it hurts for the injured. That said, if the medical bills are covered, what's the justification for another company to pay when there are no more bills?

What's sketchy about the whole situation is that the Ohio Supreme Court is an elected body, and this decision overrules earlier law by a one-vote margin, with the swing vote provided by the newest judge, Maureen O'Connor, who received \$400,000 in campaign contributions from doctors and insurance companies.

At CNN.com, a story about legislatures looking into potential political bias in universities and colleges. Most of the schools in this country are obviously unbalanced politically. The question, though, is whether that has an actual adverse affect on the education of conservatives.

The answer might be hinted at by considering the fact that plenty of conservative politicians and public figures went to top schools and got top grades at those schools. A huge number of Congresspeople from both sides of the aisle went to Harvard Law, for example, which as an institution is probably less liberal than Harvard University as a whole, but is still unlikely to be compared to Bob Jones University any time soon.

That's not conclusive, of course, and I'm certainly biased in an obvious way, but my inclination is to think that the whole thing is overblown, a corollary of the constant cries of "liberal media bias" that have decimated the ability of those media outlets perceived as liberal to have any kind of credibility to criticize a conservative regime.

Also at CNN.com, I see that the new Virginia governor, Tim Kaine, will deliver the rebuttal to Pres. Bush's State of the Union address. It's an interesting choice, given Kaine's status as a newcomer and his relatively small national profile. I can't find a list of who's given the rebuttal in the past, but as an example, Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid, far more veteran than Kaine, delivered the speech last year.

Here's a review at the Dallas Observer of Marah's album *If You Didn't Laugh, You'd Cry*. The album sounds interesting, if you can get past the tiresome whining about the state of music today, why people should appreciate albums instead of just listening to shuffle, and so on.

At the same publication, Jenny Lewis from Rilo Kiley has released a solo album which sounds right up my newfound musical alley: "Lewis pulls off a convincing turn as an old-timin' country/soul singer rather than a generic singer-songwriter."

At the Deseret Morning News, a Utah man acquitted of murder 15 years ago has confessed, which is certainly backward from what it usually is. If you're squeamish at all, I'd avoid the story, which involves a semi-graphic description of the murder of a small child.

Something that'll make approximately one person I know happy: Everwood will be back next year.

Denny Neagle could be helped out since the officer who arrested him for solicitation didn't read him his rights before Neagle made some statements that could have been damaging at trial. Those statements will be excluded as a result.

The Wizards have bought out ex-Laker Chucky Atkins's contract, allowing him to try to find a place where he can play more minutes. Atkins started just two games this year and was averaging under 20 minutes per game.

I'm only linking to this relatively routine meth conviction story because it happened in good ol' Monterey County, where I grew up for ten years before going to college. Finally, I have a response to the "It's beautiful there" I always get from people when I tell them where I grew up. "Yeah, but they got mad meth."

The government's going up against Google, trying to get them to turn over information in some of their databases

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in News at 10:16

Wednesday, October 26, 2005

Silence on torture

Brian Leiter has a post about protests against Professor John Yoo at Boalt, who wrote the infamous memo making the case that the U.S. could torture detainees. A student at Boalt whose Con Law class was interrupted by the protest wrote in. The most relevant quote from the email that Leiter posted is here: I'm certain most of my classmates are very respectful of his right to teach here, while disagreeing with his politics. Similarly, those of us in the class were pissed off as hell that our time was taken from us. On the other hand, here's one of the students who was involved in the protest (from the story that Leiter links to): There's a lot of concern about the disruption of studies, but my own studies are being disrupted when I can't sleep because I dream about what the world is like. Now, that's a little over-dramatic, but I like his style.

Particularly for law students, it doesn't seem there's a lot of choice over who your professors are. If you're in section X, and section X is assigned to have Prof. Yoo for ConLaw, then you've got him. It doesn't matter how disgusting or distasteful you find what he did, you have to take his class if you want to graduate. Imagine being told that the author of a memo that discussed ways to get around civil rights law and keep Black people from voting was going to be your professor and you've got the situation these students are in.

But they're not reacting! They care that their studies are interrupted, but they don't care that the man in front of the room, teaching them about the Constitution, didn't have strong enough morals to refuse to write such a memo. The lax attitudes of the students in Yoo's class is a strong point in favor of the National Lawyers' Guild's argument that law school creates an environment that promotes conservatism and keeps dissent to a minimum. Remember, this is Berkeley! Shouldn't there be a little more outrage? A little more concern for something other than the big-money job at Morrison & Foerster after graduation?

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in News at 16:20

Monday, October 3, 2005

A big day, though not for baseball

It's been a huge day, really.

President Bush nominated a crony with no judicial credentials to sit on the Supreme Court. Let the speculation begin that she's the target the Democrats are supposed to blast away at so that they're too tired and too politically spent to do anything about his real candidate, once Miers gets rejected (as some Republicans, angry that someone who went to a law school ranked lower in the US News list got nominated, cross the line).

The UFT and the City agreed to a new contract, though it really sounds like, at first blush, the city got the best of things, extending the work day for what seems like a fairly paltry raise.

John Roberts showed up in his robe and ... no gold stripes! CJ Rehnquist, of course, famously added gold stripes to his robe some time back, and there was great debate over whether Roberts would continue this potential new tradition. Though I never said so, I suspected he wouldn't. Everything about his character, as we can glean from his public behavior, points away from ostentatious displays, which certainly describes the stripes. Frankly, the simple black is far more stylish than the garish gold could hope to be.

Finally, tomorrow begins Rosh Hashanah, which apparently makes today Erev Rosh Hashanah (I suppose I'm learning some Hebrew?). That means I get two days off from law school, which could allow me to get ahead on the reading in a couple of my classes, which is exciting.

While I was walking toward the subway today after school, on 14th Street between 6th and 7th Avenues, I spied a small cadre of little Hasidic boys, maybe seven or eight years old. They were all wearing a bright orange sweatshirt with some kind of logo, perhaps from their school or youth group. They were apparently being shepherded by a young man nearby. I couldn't tell how old he was, but I'd figure my age or younger.

I had the Everclear bumping on my XClief when I realized that one of the little boys had caught my eye and was trying to ask me a question. I pulled out the left earbud and said, "Sorry?"

"Are you Jewish?" the kid asked, displaying a rather strong and, to me, unidentifiable accent.

"No, sorry." I'm not sure why I apologized. Am I sorry I'm not Jewish? Was I sorry he thought I was?

I realized as I walked away, glancing back at the group as they made their way east, that he and his mates weren't asking everybody this question. They weren't even asking all the white people. I thought it was odd that he thought I might be Jewish, though I did have a friend at Hampshire who assumed I was when he met me.

The big question, though: why'd he want to know? Was he going to give me something? Tell me something? As I mentioned, tomorrow begins Rosh Hashanah. Perhaps it's related? I must have a Jewish reader or two out there who can shed some light on this.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in News, Personal at 16:49

Tuesday, September 6, 2005

Bad A's, bad president

Since the A's persist in being awful and inconsistent, maddeningly so, I'm going to indulge in some quick liberal politics. On CNN.com, I see this blurb, with regard to Hurricane Katrina: "Bush to lead probe to find 'what went wrong'."

Oh, you mean like the one you led to find out what went wrong with the whole Valerie Plame thing? 'cause that one worked real well.

Posted by jason in News at 13:44

Blog Export: Beaneball, <http://beaneball.org/>

Wednesday, July 6, 2005

My funeral will be green and gold

This is sort of sweet, if a little bizarre.

Posted by jason in Football, News at 21:17

Blog Export: Beaneball, <http://beaneball.org/>

Thursday, June 30, 2005

Neat newspaper site

Courtesy of Chris Lehmann's blog, here's a really neat site that shows the current front page of newspapers all over the world. Awesome!

Posted by jason in [Computer](#), [Education](#), [News](#), [Reading](#) at 14:37

Sunday, May 29, 2005

If only the President had access to the Internet

I know certain people get a little pissy when I post about things that aren't the A's or sports or something, but here it is anyway.

From Slashdot, I get the story that a bunch of business schools are using admissions software (fill out your application online, etc.) that people could manipulate to get their decisions earlier than they were intended to. These schools, claiming a breach of ethics, then reject all candidates who accessed their information early. Some, like Carnegie Mellon and Harvard, do it outright; others, like Stanford, are a little more patient and allow applicants to explain their actions. In the end, though, out of the schools affected, only Dartmouth admitted anybody involved, and even they considered the "break-in" as a large negative factor.

Except where's the negative factor? What ethics were breached? A computer system was not cracked. Rather, a system that claimed to be secure made the mistake of putting files in a public space and figuring that by not linking to them, they'd be safe, which is, of course, ridiculous. I have files on this webspace that aren't linked that access-log spammers try to get at all the time. Is that unethical? I think it's annoying, but if I'm going to have the file available, I have to accept the consequences.

Besides which, it's not like people were accessing other people's information, or were able to change their status. They simply wanted to know whether a decision had been made. If Harvard decides to reject me from their Business School but doesn't inform me until two months after they make the decision (because that's the notification date), don't I have a right to be a little upset?

I don't claim that there's an ethical challenge to be made against the school, because they don't have a responsibility to me to make their information known, but I also expect that they can't make ethical claims against me for trying to find out the information that they're hiding.

Posted by jason in News at 16:21

Blog Export: Beaneball, <http://beaneball.org/>

Thursday, July 15, 2004

Second post

This is the second post.

It appears on blog A only but in multiple categories.

Posted by jason in News at 13:55

Blog Export: Beaneball, <http://beaneball.org/>

Tuesday, April 6, 2004

More on file sharing

Rolling Stone has the story of a new study claiming that file sharing (music downloading) does not affect record buying. One side, of course, quickly moves to denigrate the methodology, while the other side defends it. The problem, of course, is that the general public, not to mention the lawyers at the RIAA, don't have the expertise to understand and evaluate the study, nor the arguments against it.

What ends up happening is that we just side with whomever we sided with the last fifty times this came up. It doesn't really help that, even for those of us with a little statistics and a little economics in our background, we don't have a chance to make heads or tails of the paper, because it's apparently not easily available. It's probably in some journal somewhere, and Rolling Stone doesn't even bother to tell us what journal that is.

Posted by jason in News at 15:28

Friday, March 19, 2004

John McCain is a mole!

John McCain is awesome! This story, from the New York Times, discusses McCain's rejection of Republican assertions that John Kerry would "endanger national security." The best quote from McCain:

"I think he has different points of view on different issues and he will have to explain his voting record. But this kind of rhetoric, I think, is not helpful in educating and helping the American people make a choice."

Precisely! McCain basically just said that Kerry disagrees with Republicans on certain issues and that's ok. The idea that disagreement is a bad thing, that demonization of the opposition is necessary, is not a rare or original one, but ideally, it would be a non-existent one in a functional democracy. Politicians spend far too much time attacking and complaining and not enough time discussing the issues at hand so that Americans can decide the pros and cons of each side and vote for whoever they agree with most.

Instead of wondering whether Bush's National Guard duty-shirking affects his ability to be commander-in-chief (I don't think it does, in a significant way) or complaining about John Kerry throwing medals onto the White House lawn, can't the candidates deliver their plans for the future to the citizens and let us decide which is better? I'm not sure this has ever been tried, in recent times or otherwise, so to do so would be such a radical departure from the entrenched political system that I don't think we should count on seeing it happen in our lifetimes. If anything, the divisiveness and bickering in campaigns may get worse as the Republican Party has seemed to step up the militancy in recent years, and the likely eventual response from the Democrats will be to do the same.

Posted by jason in News at 00:56

Wednesday, March 17, 2004

Criminalizing homosexuality

This AP story (the link is to CNN) tells of a county in Tennessee that has asked the state legislature to allow the arrest of homosexuals and prosecution for crimes against nature.

I'm sickened to have lived in Tennessee, even if only for a very short time. Even if the state legislature were to pass the law, though, it will almost certainly be struck down in courts, thank goodness. Thus, the "physical" effects will likely not be felt, but the fact that so many people have such interest in what other people are doing in their own private lives (or rather, who other people are doing) is disgusting and embarrassing.

Posted by jason in News at 11:53

Monday, March 8, 2004

Iraq's Constitution

From this story in the Christian Science Monitor, I see that the temporary Iraq Constitution has this clause: "Equal distribution of income from natural resources."

Can we get some of that in the US? That way I can write to President Bush and demand my cut of the Alaskan drilling travesty.

To quote my friend Matthew: "DEER MR BUSH I WATN MONEY\$\$\$\$"

Posted by jason in News at 01:04

Monday, February 23, 2004

Polio

A few months ago, The New Yorker had a story about the efforts to eradicate polio, with a large part of the article dealing with the difficulty vaccinators often had in convincing parents to let their children be immunized. Groups of people, sometimes families, sometimes whole villages, occasionally decide not to allow access to their children because of rumors that the vaccine is contaminated, or that there's some kind of plot by the U.S. to kill their children or who knows what else.

And now comes this story. Three entire Nigerian states have declared that they will not participate in the vaccination drive. The New Yorker piece ended with the writer and a health official visiting a village, where they encountered a mother whose son was now stricken with the disease because she had not allowed him to be immunized. This article ends with this line:

WHO warns that at least 60 million children in the region are at risk.

Posted by jason in News at 00:51

Civilians in a war zone

After reading this article in Esquire this month (must be a subscriber to get access - sorry) by Tucker Carlson, this story about a civilian helicopter shot down in Afghanistan caught my eye.

The idea of the Carlson piece is that the U.S. military is shrunken so much that for the government to keep fighting these wars and then rebuilding nations afterward, lots and lots of private contractors (and sub-contractors, and sub-sub ...) have to be brought in for things like police-work, training of native militaries, building roads and schools, etc.

My first reaction is a negative one, as most news involving corporations almost automatically makes me say, "Bad!" On the other hand, is there anything inherently wrong about delegating different tasks to different people? Is there any reason why the military should have to hire more workers to serve food and build houses, instead of paying someone else who already has that staff? There really isn't an obvious reason why not, though I'm welcome to hear dissenting opinions.

It really comes down to economics. Is this a cheaper option? It probably would be if the government actually had a fair bidding process set up for these jobs instead of just handing out contracts to cronies. In the end, I guess that this is yet another instance of, "Theoretically, fine, in practice, awful."

Posted by jason in News at 00:44

Friday, February 20, 2004

Why can't it just be easy?

I can't make up my mind who I'm going to vote for in the New York primary (assuming I got registered in time; I hope I did). I liked Kerry over Dean, but I wonder if that wasn't some sort of "Dear God, please don't elect Dean" sentiment where I wasn't really thinking about who the candidate actually was?

This article at the Nation doesn't really help things. Edwards is pushed as the guy who's been playing nice, making this an issues campaign, not fighting dirty with Kerry and all the rest. He's even got Dean's backing, which, as much as I didn't want him elected, is a positive in my mind. On the other hand, will Edwards have the ability to withstand the inevitable dirtiness that comes with battling the Republicans in a Presidential election?

And what about his policy beliefs anyway? In a world where I only vote for who I most believe in, I vote for Kucinich. In a world where a vote for Edwards over Kerry, if I decide that's a better choice, matters, though, I have to vote for Edwards even if Kucinich is more aligned with my beliefs and views.

According to this neat page at the BBC, comparing just Edwards and Kerry (because if I end up liking Kerry more, I'm voting for Kucinich), I'm with Edwards on defence (those British!), they're pretty much the same on the economy (as far as I can tell from this capsule), I like Kerry on education ("Says teachers should not be blamed for failing schools" is key for me), they're the same on the environment (though this is always affected by the candidate's ability to not need to take money from corporations, which Kerry's personal fortune really helps with), they're the same on foreign policy, including the Iraq war, Edwards seems slightly more militant about getting people affordable healthcare, and they're almost the same on so-called "social issues" (abortion, gay rights, gun control). The BBC has Kerry outright opposing gay marriage, while Edwards would allow states to decide. On the other hand, I recall Edwards's interview with Rolling Stone where he said that he didn't believe in gay marriage. This site backs up that recollection. Whether Kerry would support a bill eliminating the possibility of gay marriage or not is unclear to me, but Edwards seems less likely to do so.

Oh, hey, Kerry is anti-death penalty, while Edwards is pro-.

So they're essentially evenly matched for my vote. I really don't know who's more "electable" nationally. Maybe I'll vote for Sharpton.

Posted by jason in News at 00:54

AT&T Wireless acquired

Is it even really news that Cingular won the bidding for AT&T Wireless? Who knows. I'm only posting it because I'm an AT&T customer. I'm sure it won't really mean many changes, although these mergers have done confusing things with regard to my broadband internet access. I still can't figure out who I should go to for help: Earthlink, Roadrunner, or Time Warner?

Posted by jason in News at 00:47

Blog Export: Beaneball, <http://beaneball.org/>

Monday, August 11, 2003

Heinz using old baseball-writer tricks

Patrick McGeehan has this article in the New York Times about Heinz manipulating their statistics (and justifying it) to make their CEO's compensation look more reasonable.

The basic idea is that Heinz used fairly arbitrary cutoff dates for showing how their stock prices have done under William Johnson. They tried to explain why they used those dates in some logical fashion, but what it adds up to is that they took out the bad data to present a nicer face to the public of what Johnson has done for them. How is this related to baseball, as alluded to in my title? It's a classic trick in sports arguments. "Well, if we take out April, because he was still getting warmed up, and July, because he had some bad spaghetti in Kansas City in the middle of that month, Bob Bobson is in the top ten for his position!" Sure, if we take out Bobson's bad stats and compare the remaining good ones to everyone else's cumulative numbers, Bobson's going to look good. If you take out everyone else's bad stats, too, though, he goes right back to where he was in the beginning, usually.

The article is closed out with a quote that I can't really top, so I'll just cut and paste:

"It's a public-relations exercise pure and simple," said Paul Hodgson, who analyzes executive pay for the Corporate Library, a research firm in Portland, Me. He said a month-by-month chart of the stock's moves after the deal would have been fairer.

"Giving stockholders the full amount of data and allowing them to draw their own conclusions about the effects of strategic decisions rather than painting rosy pictures is always the best way," Mr. Hodgson said. "There are three rules of good stockholder relations: disclosure, disclosure and disclosure."

Posted by jason in News at 11:55

Sunday, August 10, 2003

Color coding threats may not work

Philip Shenon writes in the New York Times about a Congressional report that states that the color coded terrorist threat alert system may not really work.

There are essentially two reasons. First, we regular people have no idea what to do. The country goes to orange alert, and we're not sure what we're supposed to do about it. Can I still go grocery shopping? Should that field trip to the nuclear power plant be put off? Should I call the cops on the Russian mobsters next door? Second, the colors are obviously a little vague. This reason sort of feeds the first one. Instead of telling us what kinds of activities we should avoid, what type of plot might be in the works, we're basically told, "Be a little more careful." To which we respond, "Of what!?"

There's a reason Jay Leno, Dave Letterman, and the political cartoonists of this country (and, I'm sure, numerous others) have lambasted this system practically since it debuted. Granted, these are people whose whole job it is to make fun of things, so they pretty much make fun of anything they find in the papers, but this system is such an easy target, it's impossible to avoid cracking wise about it. I'm having a hard time picturing Tom Ridge or someone actually defending the system with a straight face.

What's better than this system? Anything that promotes less FUD. Unfortunately, spreading FUD seems to be the one thing this government is really good at. Well, that and taking the credit for dispelling the (mythical) cause of those fears when elections start rolling around.

Posted by jason in News at 01:06

Thursday, August 7, 2003

Joe Lieberman proves himself lame

Joe Lieberman is bashing the more far left elements of his party, as noted in this New York Times article, hurling insults like, "He's anti-war." Ouch. I'm sure John Kerry really felt that one.

I happened across some reference to the approval rating for the war in Iraq the other day, but I can't remember where. As I recall, something on the order of 30-35% of Americans disapproved. To characterize the people who have decided that invading Iraq was not the proper thing to do as the extreme liberals and activists and Hampshire College students of America is just flat out wrong. Lieberman isn't helping himself by speaking out against Howard Dean and John Kerry this way, because I believe that the number of people who are anti-war is only going to continue to get greater as we draw closer the election. Wag the Dog situations aside (and I won't put anything past the president), the whole thing is looking something like a disaster, especially financially. Lieberman wants to bash Dick Gephardt for coming up with a huge health-care plan that leaves "no money to invest in jobs, to invest in our schools, to support our firefighters and cops, or shore up Social Security," (from the same article) but then wants to spend disastrous amounts of money to protect America's oil interests, leaving no money for firefighters, cops, teachers, Social Security, or health care.

I'm not sure who I support in this race as of yet (though Kerry appeals to me in certain ways, particularly my belief that he could actually win the Presidency were he to win the nomination), but it sure isn't Joe Lieberman.

We won't get into the whole hindsight game too much, but could Al Gore have chosen a VP candidate with a little more oomph back in the day? Lieberman's (self-proclaimedly) all about the centrist, Clinton-style politics. Well, Gore was Clinton's VP. Maybe the campaign could have used a little less Clinton and a little more good ol' Republican bashing.

Posted by jason in News at 00:58

Wednesday, August 6, 2003

Maureen Dowd weighs in on SecState flap

Here's the editorial. There are some Maureen Dowd bashers out there, but I'm not one of them. I wouldn't describe myself as familiar with her oeuvre, but I think I was pro-Dowd before I even read her just due to the kinds of views the people who bash her hold.

Anyway, this article frames the rumors that Colin Powell and Richard Armitage will be stepping down at the end of this term as a neocon pre-emptive strike plot similar to their invasion of Iraq. They don't agree with Powell's preference for diplomacy over war and his general disagreement with the neocon way of doing things, so they want him out.

I'm amused with Dowd's ability to write a politics column that comes across like she's writing Hollywood gossip like Sid Hudgens: "Off the record, on the QT, and very hush-hush."

Back to the issue at hand, though, I'm more worried now than I was a few days ago that Powell will be forced out and Bush will win re-election. This is going to mean someone like Newt Gingrich or Paul Wolfowitz as SecState, only making it more likely that we'll be drawn further into the violent quagmire this administration has gotten us into.

Posted by jason in News at 01:01

Monday, August 4, 2003

Colin Powell's status

This New York Times article discusses the speculation that Secretary of State Colin Powell would not serve in his current position if President Bush won re-election.

Powell and everyone around the reports deny them, and various notions for where the rumors came from are mentioned, including that Democrats might want to weaken the President's chances of re-election (since Powell is far more moderate than Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, et al.), or that Rumsfeld and other more right-wing administration members who have tussled with Powell might want to force the issue of his resignation.

I'm of two minds on the issue, really. Powell has seemed an eminently reasonable man in office, in sharp contrast to Bush's cronies elsewhere, so in the fairly likely event of a Bush re-election, I'd like there to be some moderation left over in his government. On the other hand, if his resignation really did destabilize the Bush regime so that enough moderates would switch votes to a Democratic candidate, I'm all for him resigning.

The problem is obviously that you never know what the consequences would be if he resigned. What if he left and Bush won anyway? What kind of SecState would Bush appoint? If you want to push me one way or the other, then, and make me choose right now, I'm going to support Powell staying in office. If nothing else, he was educated in South Bronx public schools; I can use him as a role model for my kids.

Posted by jason in News at 01:02

Sunday, August 3, 2003

Hispanic vote still very much in air

According to this story about a recent New York Times poll, Hispanics believe in the Democratic Party's principles of government with regard to managing the economy, education, jobs, and the like, but agree with the Republicans on social issues, particularly abortion and gay marriage.

This certainly creates a dilemma for the individuals who have these feelings, but it also puts a lot of pressure on political parties to try to cater to Hispanics. The article says that the group rivals African-Americans in numbers, but I was pretty sure that they were already the largest non-white group in America. Whatever the truth is, it's a huge block of voters that the two parties really need to focus on.

One of the things the article only briefly mentions is how the parties have tended to focus on Hispanics as one large group with monolithic tendencies and beliefs, which is entirely untrue. The split between Democrat government and Republican social tendencies is shown as one example of this, but more importantly, not all people labeled "Hispanic" are created the same. Cubans in Miami are going to have vastly different beliefs and voting patterns than Mexicans in California and Puerto Ricans in New York and Central Americans everywhere. People in these groups came to the U.S. for a variety of reasons, from a variety of conditions, and live in a variety of ways now. To lump them all into one group that needs to be addressed would be folly on the same level of doing the same with white or black voters.

Posted by jason in News at 01:03

Blog Export: Beaneball, <http://beaneball.org/>

Friday, August 1, 2003

USA Patriot act challenged

If you know me at all, or if you read a few other entries in this blog, you know where I stand on this. Let's wish the ACLU luck in fighting the government on this issue and hope that someone in the judicial branch still has a copy of their constitution sitting around.

Posted by jason in News at 00:53

Thursday, July 31, 2003

Gay is evil! (sarcasm)

Do I even need to comment on this? This is what happens when we let religion dictate policy, something that we supposedly do not do. The problem with not letting men marry men and women marry women (and let's not get into those who don't fit into either category) is that there's no rational, logical reason not to let them do so. Bush says that he "believes" marriage is for men and women. Since when did personal belief have a say in matters? The fact is, gay people are people, and they deserve the same rights that Bush has no problems granting straights.

I'm especially annoyed since he says we should "welcome those with good hearts" and "respect each individual." How the hell can we be less welcoming than by saying, "No, you're a second class citizen because of who you're attracted to and who you want to marry. We're going to hassle you when you want kids, mess with your taxes and insurance, and basically take away from you some of your rights as a citizen."

I don't understand how people don't see the parallels between what we're saying to the gay community and what we said to the black community in years past. Unfortunately, religion and old-school disgust still rule the country on this issue, and I don't see that going away in the short-term future.

Posted by jason in News at 01:00

Even Republicans are getting fed up

The NY Times notes that even Republicans are getting a little antsy about the Bush administration's inability to name figures for how much the rebuilding of Iraq is going to cost.

I'm happy to see Paul Wolfowitz get blasted some here, especially by the right side of the Foreign Relations Committee. This administration's lies and hiding of the truth from the public is more blatant than anything I remember learning about, and it's time other parts of the government start being vocal about it.

Perhaps my favorite excerpt from the article is this one:

Senator Lincoln Chafee, Republican of Rhode Island, accused Mr. Wolfowitz of "shifting the justification of what we're doing" in Iraq from the threat of Iraq's presumed unconventional weapons to Saddam Hussein's three decades of tyrannical rule.

Note carefully what party Chafee is a member of. The kinds of lies and half-truths that Chafee is accusing Wolfowitz of are what the left have been accusing the administration of since the beginning. If everyone but the extreme right starts jumping on this administration (and I'm grateful to Chafee for doing it here), a lot of the flexible centrist votes can come over to the left and maybe help give us a shot of toppling this regime come 2004.

Posted by jason in News at 00:55

A new California budget

The New York Times tells me that a budget has been passed (free registration required). Unfortunately, the Republican hardline stance that did not let taxes be raised means that education and health care are taking more big hits.

Dave Cox, the Republican leader in the Assembly, said the budget was a compromise that protected vital state programs without raising taxes. In a statement, he directed a shot at Mr. Davis and the Democratic majority that might be a preview of the Republican line of attack in the recall campaign.

"Of course, Californians deserved more than the failed leadership they've received under Governor Davis, whose inability to govern devastated our state's economy and left us with an unprecedented \$38 billion hole," Mr. Cox said. "There were no easy solutions, and though we proposed a budget that did not raise taxes, Democrats were not willing to make the difficult but necessary spending reductions to enact that plan."

Vital state programs like the public schools, Cox means? The right needs to get its collective head out of its ass and

start sending their kids to these schools they refuse to fund. Hell, that'd make quite a law: any legislator, whether at the state or federal level, must have his kids attending public school. While I grant it wouldn't be that effective since the neighborhoods these kids are growing up in are sure to foster nice public schools, I'd love to see where our current president would be today had he not been allowed to go to Andover (or Exeter? I never remember).

This playing of politics is screwing around with American lives, and I don't understand why people stand for it. Yes, higher taxes suck in some sense, but they pay for things! I'd rather pay higher taxes if I didn't have to see Austen worried sick about whether the kids at her camp can afford the emergency medical care they need.

Posted by jason in News at 00:48

Howard Dean is more complex than I thought

The NY Times has an interesting article on Dean and his candidacy. I had a picture of him as a pretty lefty guy, a typical Vermonter, but clearly I had no idea what I was talking about.

The article points out that Dean is actually fiscally conservative, and even draws strong support from the NRA (though it's basically only for saying that gun issues are state issues). I had been a little wary of Dean before, because I don't think he stands a snowball's chance of taking down George Bush in 2004 if he manages to win his primary. A political lifer like Al Gore got absolutely mangled by the Bush team, turning what should have been an easy victory for Gore into a shameful (for the way he just gave it up, that is) defeat. What kind of chance does a relative neophyte like Dean have?

I'm extremely willing to have a more centrist kind of Democrat in office so long as there is a Democrat in office in 2004. John Kerry may not have ever signed a bill supporting gay unions, but I trust Kerry and his team (and, lest we forget, his Heinz money) to be able to go toe-to-toe with Karl Rove, et al. It'd be nice to see a Vermont Democrat in our highest office, sure, but I don't think it's going to happen, and Massachusetts is the next best thing, isn't it?

Meanwhile, the article raises the question of whether Dean is peaking too early. Can he keep creating more and more swell behind his candidacy, or will the wave break before it reaches shore? Whether it is or isn't, I wonder if we might ask the same questions about the attacks on Bush's war. New news seems to come out every day about intelligence documents and more soldiers dying and so forth, but can the anti-Bush crew keep up the steady pounding on the hawks, hoping driving his popularity into Bloomberg territory, right up through the election?

As a pessimist, I'm going to say no. I'm afraid that Bush will somehow manage to keep slithering out of these lies, keep hoodwinking 49% of the public, and maintain just enough popularity and just enough of a policy edge (because who doesn't like tax breaks?) to win in 2004. It may take more election-night highjinks from his family to pull it off, but the Supreme Court is still configured the way it was before, so there's no reason to think that the outcome would be any different.

Posted by jason in News at 00:46

Monday, July 28, 2003

The Phillipines are in chaos

See here, for example. It's weird, the Phillipines is a place, despite its history of political unrest, that I don't really think of when thinking about unstable regions in the world. I think a large part of that is the large numbers of Filipinos I knew in high school. I don't know what their situations were at home, but I don't think anyone looked at them as refugees. It's strange the things that paint your picture of the world sometimes, especially when that picture is so inaccurate.

I think it doesn't help that the island is linked in my mind to places like Hawaii (and not without reason). Hawaii, Samoa, etc. are places where the overriding image is that people are just laid-back. Of course there couldn't be political unrest if everyone's just chillin', right? And that's exactly the problem with broad stereotypes.

Posted by jason in News at 00:52

Soldiers keep dying

This Iraq war is starting to take on tones of Vietnam, and we all know how that one ended.

Since the declaration, 49 U.S. troops have died in hostile action and 57 in accidents and what the Pentagon calls non-hostile incidents.

A total of 243 U.S. military personnel have been killed since the war in Iraq began in March.

That's from CNN. Basically, a couple more soldiers die every day from a grenade here, a car bomb there. It just keeps adding up. Lots and lots of Iraqis are probably dying as well, but that's not going to make it into the U.S. news. Even without the economic toll of the war (on both sides and, therefore, globally), the human cost should be enough to give anyone pause.

Well, anyone but the current administration.

Posted by jason in News at 00:50

Blog Export: Beaneball, <http://beaneball.org/>

Thursday, March 20, 2003

Well, it's starting

I don't even need to link this. If you've found this page, you can find a news site that's reporting that war is essentially set to begin in the next few days. It was probably inevitable before, but there was always hope.

Don't construe this as blaming the whole thing on Saddam Hussein, since George Bush is just about everything that Hussein, the Iraqi government, and the Hussein family claims he is, but you'd think that being faced with the problems he's being faced with (i.e. death for himself and his family, imprisonment, or being hunted for the rest of his life), he might just run away. I sure would.

Posted by jason in News at 00:49